

2019-20 Afternoon Book Club Selections

September 10, 2019 – *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee

In the early 1900s, teenaged Sunja, the adored daughter of a crippled fisherman, falls for a wealthy stranger at the seashore near her home in Korea. He promises her the world, but when she discovers she is pregnant--and that her lover is married--she refuses to be bought. Instead, she accepts an offer of marriage from a gentle, sickly minister passing through on his way to Japan. But her decision to abandon her home, and to reject her son's powerful father, sets off a dramatic saga that will echo down through the generations.

Richly told and profoundly moving, *Pachinko* is a story of love, sacrifice, ambition, and loyalty. From bustling street markets to the halls of Japan's finest universities to the pachinko parlors of the criminal underworld, Lee's complex and passionate characters--strong, stubborn women, devoted sisters and sons, fathers shaken by moral crisis--survive and thrive against the indifferent arc of history.

October 8, 2019 – *The Saturday Evening Girls Club* by Jane Healey

For four young immigrant women living in Boston's North End in the early 1900s, escaping tradition doesn't come easy. But at least they have one another and the Saturday Evening Girls Club, a social pottery-making group offering respite from their hectic home lives—and hope for a better future.

Ambitious Caprice dreams of opening her own hat shop, which clashes with the expectations of her Sicilian-born parents. Brilliant Ada secretly takes college classes despite the disapproval of her Russian Jewish father. Stunning Maria could marry anyone yet guards her heart to avoid the fate of her Italian Catholic mother, broken down by an alcoholic husband. And shy Thea is torn between asserting herself and embracing an antiquated Jewish tradition.

The friends face family clashes and romantic entanglements, career struggles and cultural prejudice. But through their unfailing bond, forged through their weekly gathering, they'll draw strength—and the courage to transform their immigrant stories into the American lives of their dreams.

November 12, 2019: *Circe* by Madeline Miller

In the house of Helios, god of the sun and mightiest of the Titans, a daughter is born. But Circe is a strange child—not powerful, like her father, nor viciously alluring like her mother. Turning to the world of mortals for companionship, she discovers that she does possess power—the power of witchcraft, which can transform rivals into monsters and menace the gods themselves. Threatened, Zeus banishes her to a deserted island, where she hones her occult craft, tames wild beasts and crosses paths with many of the most famous figures in all of mythology, including the Minotaur, Daedalus and his doomed son Icarus, the murderous Medea, and, of course, wily Odysseus. But there is danger, too, for a woman who stands alone, and Circe unwittingly draws the wrath of both men and gods, ultimately finding herself pitted against one of the most terrifying and vengeful of the Olympians. To protect what she loves, Circe must choose, once and for all, if she belongs with the gods, or the mortals.

December 10, 2019: *Little Fires Everywhere* by Celeste Ng

Shaker Heights, a placid, progressive suburb of Cleveland, everything is planned – from the layout of the winding roads, to the colors of the houses, to the successful lives its residents will go on to lead. And no one embodies this spirit more than Elena Richardson, whose guiding principle is playing by the rules.

Enter Mia Warren – an enigmatic artist and single mother – who arrives in this idyllic bubble with her teenaged daughter Pearl, and rents a house from the Richardsons. Soon Mia and Pearl become more than tenants: all four Richardson children are drawn to the mother-daughter pair. But Mia carries with her a mysterious past and a disregard for the status quo that threatens to upend this carefully ordered community.

When old family friends of the Richardsons attempt to adopt a Chinese-American baby, a custody battle erupts that dramatically divides the town--and puts Mia and Elena on opposing sides. Suspicious of Mia and her motives, Elena is determined to uncover the secrets in Mia's past. But her obsession will come at unexpected and devastating costs.

January 14, 2020: *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Harari

100,000 years ago, at least six human species inhabited the earth. Today there is just one. Us. Homo sapiens. In *Sapiens*, Dr Yuval Noah Harari spans the whole of human history, from the very first humans to walk the earth to the radical – and sometimes devastating – breakthroughs of the Cognitive, Agricultural and Scientific Revolutions. Drawing on insights from biology, anthropology, paleontology and economics, he explores how the currents of history have shaped our human societies, the animals and plants around us, and even our personalities. Have we become happier as history has unfolded? Can we ever free our behaviour from the heritage of our ancestors? And what, if anything, can we do to influence the course of the centuries to come? Bold, wide-ranging and provocative, *Sapiens* challenges everything we thought we knew about being human: our thoughts, our actions, our power ... and our future.

February 11, 2020: *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood* by Trevor Noah

Trevor Noah's unlikely path from apartheid South Africa to the desk of *The Daily Show* began with a criminal act: his birth. Trevor was born to a white Swiss father and a black Xhosa mother at a time when such a union was punishable by five years in prison. Living proof of his parents' indiscretion, Trevor was kept mostly indoors for the earliest years of his life, bound by the extreme and often absurd measures his mother took to hide him from a government that could, at any moment, steal him away. Finally liberated by the end of South Africa's tyrannical white rule, Trevor and his mother set forth on a grand adventure, living openly and freely and embracing the opportunities won by a centuries-long struggle.

***Born a Crime* is the story of a mischievous young boy who grows into a restless young man as he struggles to find himself in a world where he was never supposed to exist. It is also the story of that young man's relationship with his fearless, rebellious, and fervently religious mother—his teammate, a woman determined to save her son from the cycle of poverty, violence, and abuse that would ultimately threaten her own life.**

March 10, 2020: *Rent Collector* by Camron Steve Wright

Survival for Ki Lim and Sang Ly is a daily battle at Stung Meanchey, the largest municipal waste dump in all of Cambodia. They make their living scavenging recyclables from the trash. Life would be hard enough without the worry for their chronically ill child, Nisay, and the added expense of medicines that are not working. Just when things seem worst, Sang Ly learns a secret about the ill-tempered rent collector who comes demanding money--a secret that sets in motion a tide that will change the life of everyone it sweeps past. The Rent Collector is a story of hope, of one woman's journey to save her son and another woman's chance at redemption. It demonstrates that even in a dump in Cambodia--perhaps especially in a dump in Cambodia--everyone deserves a second chance.

April 14, 2020: *Before We Were Yours* by Lisa Wingate

Memphis, 1939. Twelve-year-old Rill Foss and her four younger siblings live a magical life aboard their family's Mississippi River shantyboat. But when their father must rush their mother to the hospital one stormy night, Rill is left in charge—until strangers arrive in force. Wrenched from all that is familiar and thrown into a Tennessee Children's Home Society orphanage, the Foss children are assured that they will soon be returned to their parents—but they quickly realize the dark truth. At the mercy of the facility's cruel director, Rill fights to keep her sisters and brother together in a world of danger and uncertainty.

Aiken, South Carolina, present day. Born into wealth and privilege, Avery Stafford seems to have it all: a successful career as a federal prosecutor, a handsome fiancé, and a lavish wedding on the horizon. But when Avery returns home to help her father weather a health crisis, a chance encounter leaves her with uncomfortable questions and compels her to take a journey through her family's long-hidden history, on a path that will ultimately lead either to devastation or to redemption.

Based on one of America's most notorious real-life scandals—in which Georgia Tann, director of a Memphis-based adoption organization, kidnapped and sold poor children to wealthy families all over the country—Lisa Wingate's riveting, wrenching, and ultimately uplifting tale reminds us how, even though the paths we take can lead to many places, the heart never forgets where we belong.

May 12, 2020: *The Alice Network* by Kate Quinn

1947. In the chaotic aftermath of World War II, American college girl Charlie St. Clair is pregnant, unmarried, and on the verge of being thrown out of her very proper family. She's also nursing a desperate hope that her beloved cousin Rose, who disappeared in Nazi-occupied France during the war, might still be alive. So when Charlie's parents banish her to Europe to have her "little problem" taken care of, Charlie breaks free and heads to London, determined to find out what happened to the cousin she loves like a sister.

1915. A year into the Great War, Eve Gardiner burns to join the fight against the Germans and unexpectedly gets her chance when she's recruited to work as a spy. Sent into enemy-occupied France, she's trained by the mesmerizing Lili, the "Queen of Spies", who manages a vast network of secret agents right under the enemy's nose.

Thirty years later, haunted by the betrayal that ultimately tore apart the Alice Network, Eve spends her days drunk and secluded in her crumbling London house. Until a young American barges in uttering a name Eve hasn't heard in decades, and launches them both on a mission to find the truth...no matter where it leads.

June 9, 2020: TBD